



## CASE STUDY REPORT

# Using Every Child a Writer to boost vocabulary in Year 3 and 4 writing

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*This study was originally published in 2010 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.*

## Abstract

**Background:** The purpose of the study was to boost levels of writing in Years 3 & 4 by using a 3 tiered approach of Quality First Teaching, Guided group work, and 1:1 tuition, with a focus on improving the quality of vocabulary used in pupils' writing.

**Aims:** The main aim of the Every Child a Writer initiative is to boost levels of writing in Years 3 & 4 by using a 3 tiered approach of Quality First Teaching, Guided group work, and 1:1 tuition.

**Methods:** The participants in the Every Child a Writer initiative included administrative and support staff, headteachers, middle leaders, subject leaders, teachers, and 1:1 tutors. They were supported by the LA consultant and the Early Literacy Lead. Methods used include Quality First Teaching, Guided group work, 1:1 tuition, magpie-ing, stacking words, borrowing ideas from books and authors, and using sentence openers. These help to boost vocabulary and improve the quality of text cohesion.

**Findings:** The main findings are that the use of Talk for Writing and Guided Writing strategies have had a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership. Pupils have become more enthusiastic about writing and have developed a wider range of vocabulary. Teachers have been given permission to incorporate more talk in their teaching and literacy boards are becoming working walls.

**Implications:** The findings suggest that incorporating Talk for Writing strategies, such as Walk and Talk, stacking and piling words, and using quality texts, can help to improve the quality and range of vocabulary used in pupils' writing. This can lead to increased enthusiasm for writing, improved confidence, and better self and peer assessment.

*This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.*

**Keywords:** Primary education; English - speaking and listening; English - writing

## Introduction

### What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

I became involved in the Every Child a Writer initiative as a Leading Teacher working with my own school and two others.

The guiding principle behind ECaW is to boost levels of writing in Years 3 & 4 using a 3 tiered approach:

- Quality First Teaching
- Guided group work
- 1:1 tuition

The methods outlined in the case study to boost vocabulary can be used in all of these three areas to good effect.

One of the issues encountered was the limited vocabulary of some of the children in the different classes.

### Who might find this case study useful?

- Administrative and support staff
- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- Subject leader
- Teacher

## Description

### What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- English - speaking and listening
- English - writing

### How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

By encouraging the children to become more enthusiastic about the writing process and the choices that a writer makes.

By improving the quality of the vocabulary used in pupils' writing through using strategies such as 'magpie-ing' and stacking words. Stacking words is a technique referred to by Pie Corbett in Talk for Writing materials and involves making a list or pile or 'stack' of words in a space when drafting and making a considered choice at the point of writing up.

Variety in sentence openers, by borrowing ideas from a range of books and authors.

Overall quality of text cohesion where words are used to good effect.

### What were your success criteria?

That pupils achieve a secure level 3 by the end of Year 4 (ECaW criterion).

75% of children to achieve 2 sub levels progress within the academic year, particularly in the writing strands.

That children are incorporating new and exciting vocabulary into their writing.

To ensure that pupils who are falling behind are quickly identified and that actions are taken to get them back on track, including use of ECaW 1:1 tuition focusing on appropriate pupil writing targets.

## What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Data comparison of cohorts
- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupils' work
- Test results

## Describe the CPD approaches you used

Working as a Leading Teacher for the ECaW initiative I coached Year 3 and 4 teachers in both my own school and two others. This involved supporting planning and helping to implement and embed Support for Writing and Talk for Writing materials from the Renewed Primary Framework.

There was also a focus on using Guided Writing on a regular basis with carefully selected targets to accelerate individual pupil progress.

Termly cluster meetings (with my own and the two supported schools) were held to share practice and cascade new initiatives and ideas.

Within my own school we ran training sessions on both Talk for Writing and Guided Writing. Guided writing being part of the school development programme and a focus for performance management.

## What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

National Training for Every Child a Writer

INSET on Talk for Writing and Guided Writing:

The talk for writing training included sessions by the Early Literacy Lead, myself as an ECaW leading teacher and the Literacy Coordinator. We each shared a practical application of Talk for Writing in our own Key Stage (covering Foundation, KS1 and KS2). These involved 'The Little Red Hen' storytelling and mapping and boxing-up (splitting a story into its generic constituent parts).

Working with Literacy Coordinator

LA support

ECaW LA review meetings

Related National Strategies resources:

## Who provided you with support?

- Middle leader
- School leader
- Senior management

## How were you supported?

- Year 3 and 4 teachers had access to National CPD days
- 1:1 tutors were offered national training
- Termly review meeting for ECaW Leading Teachers with LA consultant

## Impact

### What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Children have become incredibly enthusiastic about trying out new words and expanding their vocabulary. They have developed a sense of pride if they can include words or sentence openers that they have maggied from other people or sources.

They aim to have their work used as a WAGOLL (What a good one looks like) and always incorporate 'WOW words' in their Success Criteria.

When using two stars and a wish to assess their own work and that of their peers they comment on adjectives and wow words.

The quality and range of vocabulary used in their writing has improved, for example Y2 children using the word 'undulating' confidently.

### Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Being given permission to 'steal' or 'maggie' words has liberated the children and helped them to overcome the blank page syndrome. They understand that correct spelling does not always have to be the primary focus in writing, with slogans such as 'Never dodge a good word!' and 'Remember! Your first thought is not always your best!' encouraging them to have a go and then check and edit. Talk for Writing strategies including Walk and Talk, stacking and piling words help them to understand the process involved in writing. Games such as 'Crossing the River' tap into a child's natural resource: their imagination! They are encouraged to be creative and to let their imaginations run riot.

Seeing the teacher modelling the process of incorporating magpie words and rehearsing and editing their writing puts their own writing into a real context. These all combine to build pupil confidence.

In addition giving children ownership of their own learning and the development of their own targets inspires them to achieve more.

### Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

"I found discussions based around the Talk for Writing materials very useful, and now embed these strategies in my practice where possible as this has had an obvious impact on the children. In their Optional SATS results, I was very pleased to read words like melancholy, immense and petrified which came about from using the materials." Supported Y4 teacher.

"The lower ability children are more confident in their range of vocabulary and 'never dodge a good word'." Supported Y3 teacher.

Let's fill the box with as many words as we can: I want us to get the most. We need more." Reluctant Year 4 boy writer when using Wordle.

### Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

## Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

## Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Self and peer assessment shows that children are starting to focus on word choices and are discussing these in an informed manner. In lesson observations comments have been made that this assessment is made confidently and is now an intrinsic part of their learning.

The children's writing shows that they now use a wider range of adventurous and appropriate vocabulary and are excited about discovering and magpieing new words. APP backed up teachers' judgements the quality of writing has improved.

The pupil progress data and data comparison of cohorts all show good progress. The pupil progress data is based on APP and Optional Test results.

## What has been the impact on teaching?

Teachers feel as if they have been given permission to incorporate more talk in their teaching of writing and to allow sufficient time for these activities. Drama and speaking and listening activities have been given a new status in the teaching sequence and the feeling that something always has to be written down has been dispelled. Evidence of other kinds is permissible! Because of this, confidence and creativity has been encouraged and this enthusiasm for the different strategies has necessarily impacted on the children. Planning now incorporates specific Talk for Writing opportunities and Guided Writing groups are becoming embedded as a crucial part of the 3 tier strategy of Every Child a Writer.

## Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

"I didn't know you could just talk in a Guided Writing session. That's fantastic! You mean we can generate the ideas and the words and help them do that?" Year 1 teacher after twilight session on Guided Writing.

## Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Teacher perceptions

## Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Teacher perceptions

Evidence from planning

Evidence from observation and monitoring

## What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Certainly in my own school and in one of the other schools that I have supported Every Child a Writer has formed an integral part of the School Development Plan and Talk for Writing training has been implemented. The Guided Writing process has also become a part of performance management to ensure that it is being effectively incorporated and embedded in both planning and teaching.

Literacy boards are becoming working walls and are increasingly reflecting the process involved in writing and

the increased use of word banks generated by the children. Different teachers have introduced either class, group or individual magpie books and stacking and tiling of words is an automatic process engaged in by the children.

### Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

- ECaW Leading Teacher now being asked to model good practice to other schools/teachers
- ECaW Leading Teacher now working alongside Literacy Coordinator and Early Literacy Lead in a coordinator team.
- Pupil voice as part of AFL and individual target setting
- Renewed Framework – gave us the opportunity to review planning and to look closely and to change some of our practice inc the importance of talk in the writing process.

## Summary

### What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

The willingness of the different teachers to accommodate new ideas and to embed them in their teaching.

### What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

- Talk for writing materials
- Support for Writing
- Pupil Writing Targets
- Quality texts
- LA Literacy Consultant

### What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

- National Training for ECaW leading teachers.
- YEar 3 and 4 teachers also found National Training crucial and access to exemplified units eg Rainforest Unit.

### If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- You would need to start by using Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing material.
- Quality texts are crucial, as is living the text. A supported teacher recently said "Your work here is done" as she started to describe how they could build a large cardboard pyramid in their class for the children to peer into with a torch/candle to discover Tutankhamun's tomb!

### What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

- I will continue to embed peer and self assessment in my class and to encourage this in other classes as this 'ratchets up pupils' achievement a further notch' (AST observation comment).
- Working literacy boards with pupil generated word banks and ideas.
- A wide variety of stimuli both inside and outside the classroom is crucial.
- Continued training and sharing of good practice.

## Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Issues and Dilemmas Plans.zip
- Short Term Plan Literacy Summer 2 2010 wc 21 june.doc

- Supported Y4 teacher lesson on The Hunter.doc
- wordle hear.jpg
- wordle touch.jpg
- Literacy Lesson Plan guided writing Van Gogh (no image).doc
- Samples of work done as result of Y4 lesson.pdf
- Results for a Y3 ECaW cohort.doc

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## About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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